

RELIGIO LAICI:

O R, A

Layman's Faith.

A

P O E M.

Written by Mr. DRYDEN.

Ornari res ipsa negat ; contenta doceri—

L O N D O N.

Printed and Sold by H. Hills, in Black-fryars near
the Water-side. 1710.

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To Mr. *DRYDEN*,
ON HIS
RELIGIO LATCH.

BEgone you Slaves, you Idle Vermine go.
Fly from the Scourges, and your Master know;
Let free, impartial men from *Dryden* learn
Mysterious Secrets, of a high concern,
And weighty Truths, solid convincing Sense,
Explain'd by unaffected Eloquence.

What can you (*Reverend Levi*) here take ill?
Men still had faults, and men will have them still;
He that hath none, and lives as Angels do
Must be an Angel; but what's that to you?

While mighty *Lewis* finds the *Pope* too great,
And dreads the Yoke of his imposing Seat,
Our Sects are more Tyrannick Power assume,
And would for Scorpions change the Rods of *Rome*.
That Church detain'd the Legacy Divine;
Fanaticks cast the Pearls of Heaven to Swine:
What then have honest thinking men to do,
But chuse a mean between th' Usurping two?

Nor can the *Aegyptian* Patriarch blame a Muse,
Which for his firmness does his heat excuse;
Whatever Counsels have approv'd his Creed,
The *PREFACE* sure was his own Act and Deed.



Our

Our Church will have that Preface read (You'll }
 'Tis true, But so she will th' *Apocrypha*; [say,)
 And such as can believe them freely may.

But did that *God* (so little understood)
 Whose *Darling* attribute is being good,
 From the dark Womb of the Rude Chaos bring
 Such various Creatures, and make Man their King;
 Yet leave his *Favorite, Man*, his chiefest care,
 More wretched than the vilest Insects are?

O! how much happier and more safe are they?
 If helpless Millions must be doom'd a Prey
 To Yelling Furies, and for ever burn
 In that sad place from whence is no return,
 For unbelief is one they never knew,
 Or for not doing what they could not do!

The very *Fiends* know for what Crime they fell,
 (And so do all their Followers that rebel)
 If then a blind, well-meaning, *Indian* stray,
 Shall the great Gulph be shew'd him for the way?

For better ends our kind Redeemer dy'd,
 Or the fall'n Angels Rooms will be but ill supply'd.

That *Christ*, who at the great deciding Day
 (For he declares what he resolves to say.)
 Will damn the Goats, for their *Ill-natur'd* faults,
 And save the Sheep, for *Actions*, not for Thoughts,
 Hath too much mercy to send men to Hell,
 For humble Charity, and hoping well.

To what Stupidity are Zealots grown,
 Whose inhumanity profusely shown [own! }
 In Damning Crouds of Souls, may Damn their
 I'll err at least on the securer side,

A Convert free from Malice and from Pride.

THE P R E F A C E

A Poem with so bold a Title, and a Name prefix'd, from which the handling of so serious a Subject wou'd not be expected, may reasonably oblige the Author, to say somewhat in defence both of himself, and of his undertaking. In the first place, if it be objected to me, that being a Layman, I ought not to have concern'd my self with Speculations, which belong to the Profession of Divinity; I cou'd Answer, that perhaps, Laymen, with equal advantages of Parts and Knowledge, are not the most incompetent Judges of Sacred things; But in the due sense of my own weakness and want of Learning, I plead not this: I pretend not to make my self a Judge of Faith, in others, but only to make a Confession of my own; I lay no unhallowed hand upon the Ark; but wait on it, with the Reverence that becomes me at a distance: In the next place I will ingeniously confess, that the helps I have us'd in this small Treatise, were many of them taken from the Works of our own Reverend Divines of the Church of England; so that the Weapons with which I combat Irreligion are already consecrated; though I suppose they may be taken down as lawfully as the Sword of Goliath was by David, when they are to be employed for the common Cause, against the Enemies of Piety. I intend not by this to intitle them to any of my errors; which, yet, I hope are only those of Charity to Mankind; and such as my own charity has caus'd me to commit, that of others may more easily excuse. Being naturally inclin'd to Scepticism in Philosophy, I have no reason to impose my Opinions, in a Subject which is above it. But whatever they are, I submit them with all Reverence to my Mother Church, accounting them no farther mine, than as they are authorized, or at least, uncondemn'd by her. And indeed, to secure my self on this side, I have us'd the necessary Precaution, of showing this Paper before it was publish'd to a judicious and learned Friend, a man indefatigably zealous in the service of the Church and State: and whose Writings have highly deserv'd of both. He was pleas'd to approve the body of the Discourse, and I hope he is more my Friend, than to do it out of Complaisance: 'Tis true he had too good a taste to like it all; and amongst some other faults recommended to my second view, what I have written, perhaps too boldly, on St. Athanasius: which he advis'd me wholly to omit. I am sensible enough that I had done more prudently to have follow'd his opinion; But then I could not have satisfied my



self, that I had done honestly not to have written what was my own. It has always been my thought, that Heathens, who never did, nor without Miracle cou'd here of the Name of Christ, were yet in a possibility of Salvation. Neither will it enter easily into my belief, that before the coming of our Saviour, the whole World, excepting only the Jewish Nation, shou'd lye under the inevitable necessity of everlasting Punishment, for want of that Revelation, which was confin'd to so small a spot of ground as that of Palestine. Among the Sons of Noah we read of one only who was accus'd; and if a blessing in the ripeness of time was reserv'd for Japhet, (of whose Progeny we are,) it seems unaccountable to me, why so many Generations of the same Offspring, as preceded our Saviour in the Flesh, shou'd be all involv'd in one common condemnation, and yet that their Posterity shou'd be entituled to the hopes of Salvation: As if a Bill of Exclusion had pass'd only on the Fathers, which debarr'd not the Sons from their Succession. Or that so many Ages had been deliver'd over to Hell, and so many reserv'd for Heaven, and that the Devil had the first choice, and God the next. Truly I am apt to think, that the revealed Religion which was taught by Noah to all his Sons might continue for some Ages in the whole Posterity. That afterwards it was included wholly in the Family of Sem is manifest: but when the Progenies of Cham and Japhet swarm'd into Colonies, and those Colonies were subdivided into many others; in process of time their Descendants lost by little and little the Primitive and Purer Rites of Divine Worship, retaining only the notion of one Deity; to which succeeding Generations added others: (for men took their Degrees in those Ages from Conquerors to Gods.) Revelation being thus eclipsed to almost all Mankind, the light of Nature as the next in Dignity was substituted; and that is it which St. Paul concludes to be the Rule of the Heathens; and by which they are hereafter to be judg'd. If my supposition be true, then the consequence which I have assum'd in my Poem may be also true; namely, that Deism, or the Principles of Natural Worship, are only the faint remnants or dying flames of reveal'd Religion in the Posterity of Noah. And that our Modern Philosophers, nay and some of our Philosophising Divines have too much exalted the faculties of our Souls, when they have maintain'd that by their force mankind has been able to find out that there is one Supreme Agent or Intellectual Being which we call God: that Praise and Prayer are his due Worship; and the rest of those deducements, which I am confident are the remote effects of Revelation, and unattainable by our Discourse, I mean as simply considered, and without the benefit of Divine Illumination. So that we have not lifted up our selves to God, by the weak Pinions of our Reason but he has been pleas'd to descend to us: and what Socrates said of him, what Plato writ, and the rest of the Heathen Philosophers of several Nations, is all no more than the Twilight of Revelation, after the Sun if it was set in the Race of Noah. That there is something about us, some Principle of motion, our Reason can apprehend, though it cannot

discover what it is, by its own Virtue. And indeed it is very improbable, that we, who by the strength of our faculties cannot enter into the knowledge of any Being, not so much as of our own, should be able to find out by them, that Supreme Nature, which we cannot otherwise define, than by saying it is Infinite; as if Infinite were definable, or Infinity a Subject for our narrow understanding. They who would prove Religion by Reason, do but weaken the cause which they endeavour to support: 'tis to take away the Pillar from our Faith, and to prop it only with a twig: 'tis to design a Tower like that of Babel, which if it were possible (as it is not) to reach Heaven would come to nothing by the confusion of the Workmen. For every man is Building a several way; impotently conceited of his own Model, and his own Materials: Reason is always striving, and always at a loss: and of necessity it must so come to pass, while 'tis exercis'd about that which is not its proper object. Let us be content at last, to know God by his own Methods; at least so much of him, as he is pleas'd to reveal to us in the Sacred Scriptures; to apprehend them to be the Word of God, is all our Reason has to do; for all beyond it is the work of Faith, which is the Seal of Heaven impress'd upon our human understanding.

And now for what concerns the Holy Bishop Athanasius, the Preface of whose Creed seems inconsistent with my opinion; which is, that Heathens may possibly be sav'd; in the first place I desire it may be consider'd that it is the Preface only, not the Creed it self, which, (till I am better inform'd) is of too hard a digestion for my Charity. 'Tis not that I am ignorant how many several Texts of Scripture seemingly support that Cause: but neither am I ignorant how all those Texts may receive a kinder, and more mollified Interpretation. Every man who is read in Church History knows that Belief was drawn up after a long contestation with Arians, concerning the Divinity of our Blessed Saviour, and his being one Substance with the Father; and that thus compil'd, it was sent abroad among the Christian Churches, as a kind of Test, which whosoever took, was look'd on as an Orthodox Believer. 'Tis manifest from hence, that the Heathen part of the Empire was not concerned in it: for its business was not to distinguish betwixt Pagans and Christians, but betwixt Hereticks and true Believers. Thus, well consider'd, takes off the Heavy weight of Censure, which I wou'd willingly avoid from so venerable a Man; for if this Proportion, Whosoever will be sav'd, be restrained only to those to whom it was intended, and for whom it was composed, I mean the Christians; then the Anathema reaches not the Heathens, who had never heard of Christ, and were nothing interested in that dispute. After all, I am far from blaming even that Prefatory addition to the Creed, and as far from cavelling at the continuation of it in the Liturgy of the Church; where, on the days appointed, 'tis publicly read: For, I suppose, there is the same reason for it now, in opposition to the Socinians, as there was then against the Arians; the one being a Heresie, which seems to have been refin'd out of the other; and

and with how much more plausibility of Reason it combats our Religion, with so much more caution to be avoided: and therefore the prudence of our Church is to be commended, which has interpos'd her Authority for the recommendation of this Creed. Yet to such as are grounded in the true believe, those explanatory Creeds, the Nicene and this of Athanasius might perhaps be spar'd: for what is Supernatural, will always be a Mystery in spite of Exposition: and for my own part the plain Apostles Creed is most suitable to my weak understanding; as the simplest diet is the most easie of Digestion.

I have dwelt longer on this Subject than I intended; and longer than, perhaps, I ought; for having laid down, as my Foundation, that the Scripture is a Rule; that in all things needful to Salvation, it is clear, sufficient, and ordain'd by God Almighty for that purpose, I have left my self no right to interpret obscure places, such as concern the possibility of eternal happiness to Heathens: because whatsoever is obscure is concluded not necessary to be known.

But by asserting the Scripture to be the Canon of our Faith, I have unavoidably created to my self two sorts of Enemies: The Papists indeed, more directly, because they have kept the Scripture from us, what they cou'd; and have reserv'd to themselves a right of Interpreting what they have deliver'd under the pretence of Infallibility: and the Fanaticks more collaterally, because they have assum'd what amounts to an Infallibility, in the private Spirit: and have detorted those Texts of Scripture, which are not necessary to Salvation, to the damnable uses of Sedition, disturbance and destruction of the Civil Government. To begin with the Papists, and to speak freely, I think them the less dangerous (at least in appearance to our present State) for not only the Penal Laws are in Force against them, and their number is contemptible; but also their Peerage and Commons are excluded from Parliaments, and consequently those Laws in no probability of being Repeal'd. A General and Uninterrupted Plot of their Clergy, ever since the Reformation, I suppose all Protestants believe. For 'tis not reasonable to think but that so many of their Orders, as were cuted from their fat Possessions, wou'd endeavour a re-entrance against those whom they account Hereticks. As for the late design, Mr. Coleman's Letters, for ought I know are the best Evidence; and what they discover, without wyre-drawing their Sense, or malicious Glosses, all Men of reason conclude credible. If there be any thing more than this requir'd of me, I must believe it as well as I am able, in spite of the Witnesses, and out of a decent conformity to the Votes of Parliament: For I suppose the Fanaticks will not allow the private Spirit in this Case: Here the Infallibility is at least in one part of the Government; and our understandings as well as our wills are represented. But to return to the Roman Catholicks, how can we be secure from the practice of Jesuited Papists in that Religion; For not two or three of that Order, as some of them would impose upon us, but almost the whole Body of them are of opinion, that their infallible Master

has a right over Kings, not only in Spirituals but Temporal. Not to name Mariano, Bellarmine, Emanuel Sa, Molina, Sentarar, Simanca, and at least twenty others of Foreign Countries; we can produce of our own Nation, Campian, and Doleman or Parsons, besides many are nam'd whom I have not read, who all of them attest this Doctrine, that the Pope can depose and give away the Right of any Sovereign Prince, si vel paulum deflexerit, if he shall never so little Worp: but if he once comes to be Excommunicated, then the Bond of obedience is taken off from Subjects; and they may and ought to drive him like another Nebuchadnezzar, ex hominum Christianorum Dominatu, from exercising Dominion over Christians: and to this they are bound by virtue of Divine Precept, and by all the ties of Conscience under no less Penalty than Damnation. If they answer me (as a Learned Priest has lately Written,) that this Doctrine of the Jesuites is not de fide, and that consequently they are not oblig'd by it, they must pardon me, if I think they have said nothing to the purpose; for 'tis a Maxim in their Church, where Points of Faith are not decided, and that Doctors are of contrary opinions, they may follow which part they please: but more safely the most receiv'd and most authoriz'd. And their Champion Bellarmine has told the World, in his Apology, that the King of England is a Vassal to the Pope, ratione directi Domini, and that he holds in Villanage of his Roman Landlord. Which is no new claim put in for England. Our Chronicles are his Authentique Witnesses, that, King John was depos'd by the same Plea, and Phillip Augustus admitted Tenant. And which makes the more for Bellarmine, the French King was again ejected when our King submitted to the Church, and the Crown receiv'd under the sordid Condition of a Vassalage.

'Tis not sufficient for the more moderate and well-meaning Papists, (of which I doubt not there are many) to produce the Evidences of their Loyalty to the late King, and to declare their Innocency in this Plot; I will grant their behaviour in the first, to have been as Loyal and as brave as they desire, and will be willing to hold them excus'd as to the second, (I mean when it comes to my turn, and after my betters; for 'tis a madness to be sober alone, while the Nation continues Drunk:) but that Saying of their Father Crec. is still running in my head, that they may be dispens'd with in their Obedience to an Heretick Prince, while the necessity of the times shall oblige them to it: (for that (as another of them tells us,) is only the effect of Christian Prudence) but when once they shall get power to shake him off, an Heretick is no lawful King, and consequently to rise against him is no Rebellion. I should be glad therefore, that they wou'd follow the advice which was charitably given them by a Reverend Prelate of our Church, namely, that they would joyn in a publick Act of disowning and detesting those Jesuitick Principles; and subscribe to all Doctrines which deny the Pope's Authority of Deposing Kings, and releasing Subjects from their Oath of Allegiance: to which I should think they might easily be induc'd, if it be true that this present

Pope

Pope has condemn'd the Doctrine of King-killing (a Thesis of the Jesuites) amongst others *ex Cathedra* (as they call it) or in open Consistory.

Leaving them, therefore, in so fair a way (if they please themselves) of satisfying all reasonable Men, of their sincerity and good meaning to the Government, I shall make bold to consider that other extreme of our Religion, I mean the Fanaticks, or Schismaticks, of the English Church. Since the Bible has been translated into our Tongue, they have us'd it so, as if their business was not to be sav'd, but to be damn'd by its Contents, if we consider only them, better had it been for the English Nation, that it had still remain'd in the original Greek and Hebrew, or at least in the honest Latin of St. Jerome, than that several Texts in it, should have been prevaricated to the destruction of that Government which put it into so ungrateful hands.

How many Heresies the first Translation of Tyndal produced in few years, let my Lord Herbert's History of Henry the Eighth inform you; Inasmuch that for the gross errors in it, and the great mischiefs it occasion'd, a Sentence pass'd on the first Edition of the Bible, too shameful almost to be repeated. After the short Reign of Edward the Sixth (who had continued to carry on the Reformation, on other Principles than it was begun) every one knows that not only the chief Promoters of that Work, but many others, whose Consciences wou'd not dispence with Popery, were forc'd for fear of persecution, to change Climates: from whence returning at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's Reign, many of them who had been in France, and at Geneva, brought back the rigid opinions and imperious discipline of Calvin, to graff upon our Reformation. which though they cunningly conceal'd at first, (as well knowing how nauseously that Drug wou'd go down in a lawful Monarchy, which was prescrib'd for a rebellious Common-wealth) yet they always kept it in reserve; and were never wanting to themselves either in Court or Parliament, when either they had any prospect of a numerous Party of Fanatick Members in the one, or the Encouragement of any Favourite in the other, whose Covetousness was gaping at the Patrimony of the Church. They who will consult the Works of our venerable Hooker, or the account of his Life, or more particularly the Letter written to him on his Subject, by George Cranmer, may see by what gradations they proceeded; from the dislike of Cap and Surplice, the very next Step was Admonitions to the Parliament against the whole Government Ecclesiastical; then came out Volumes in English and Latin in defence of their Tenets: and immediately Practices were set on foot to erect their Discipline without Authority. Those not succeeding, Satyr and Railing was the next: And Martin Mar-Prelate (the Marvel of those times) was the first Presbyterian Scribler, who sanctify'd Libels and Scurrility to the use of the Good Old Cause. Which was done (say's my Author) upon this account; that (their serious Treatises having been fully answered and refuted) they might compass by railing what they had lost by reasoning; and when their Cause was sunk in Court and Parliament, they might

might at least hedge in a flake amongst the Rabble: for to their ignorance all things are Wit which are abusive; but if Church and State were made the Theme, then the Doctoral Degree of Wit was to be taken at Billingsgate: even the Most Saint-like of the Party, though they durst not excuse this contempt and villyfying of the Government, yet were pleas'd, and grin'd at it with a pious smile; and call'd it a judgment of God against the Hierarchy. Thus Sectaries, we may see, were born with teeth, foul mouth'd and scurrilous from their infancy: and if Spiritual Pride, Venome, Violence, Contempt of Superiours and Slander had been the marks of Orthodox Belief; the Presbytery and the rest of our Schismaticks, which are their Spawn, were always the Most visible Church in the Christian World.

'Tis true, the Government was too strong at that time for a Rebellion; but to shew what proficiency they had made in Calvin's School, even Then their mouth's water'd at it: for two of their gifted Brotherhood (Hacket and Coppinger) as the Story tells us, got up into a Pease-Cart, and harangued the People, to dispose them to an Insurrection, and to establish the Discipline by force: so that however it comes about, that now they celebrate Queen Elizabeth's Birth-night, as that of their Saint and Patroness; yet then they were for doing the work of the Lord by Arms against her; and in all probability, they wanted but a Fanatique Lord Mayor and two Sheriffs of their Party to have compass'd it.

Our venerable Hooker, after many Admonitions which he had given them, toward the end of his Preface, breaks out into this Prophetick Speech, "There is in every one of these Considerations most just cause to fear, lest our hastiness to embrace a thing of so perilous consequence (meaning the Presbyterian Discipline) should cause Posterity to feel those Evils, which as yet are more easie for us to prevent than they would be for them to remedy."

How fatally this Cassandra has foretold we know too well by sad experience: the Seeds were sown in the time of Queen Elizabeth, the bloody Harvest ripened in the Reign of King Charles the Martyr: and because all the Sheaves could not be carried off without shedding some of the loose Grains, another Crop is too like to follow; nay I fear 'tis unavoidable, if the Conventiclers be permitted still to scatter.

A man may be suffer'd to quote an Adversary to our Religion, when he speaks Truth: and 'tis the observation of Meimbourg in his History of Calvinism, that where-ever this Discipline was planted and embrac'd, Rebellion, Civil-War and Misery attended it. And how indeed should it happen otherwise? Reformation of Church and State has always been the ground of our Divisions in England. While we are Papists, our Holy Father rid us, by pretending authority out of the Scriptures to depose Princes; when we shook off his Authority, the Sectaries furnish'd themselves with the same Weapons; and out of the same Magazine, the Bible. So that the Scriptures, which are in themselves the greatest security of Governours, as commanding express obedience to them,

them, are now turn'd to their destruction; and never since the Reformation, has there wanted a Text of their interpreting to Authorize a Rebel. And 'tis to be noted by the way, that the Doctrines of King-killing and Deposing, which have been taken up only by the worst Party of the Papists, the most frontless Flatterers of the Pope's Authority, have been espous'd, defended and are still maintain'd by the whole body of Non-conformists and Republicans. 'Tis but dubbing themselves the People of God, which 'tis the Interest of their Preachers to tell them they are and their own Interest to believe; and after that, they cannot dip into the Bible, but one Text or another will turn up for their purpose: If they are under Persecution (as they call it,) then that is a mark of their Election; if they flourish, then God works Miracles for their Deliverance, and the Saints are to possess the Earth.

They may think themselves to be too roughly handled in this Paper; but I who know best how far I could have gone on this Subject, must be bold to tell them they are spar'd: though at the same time I am not Ignorant that they interpret the mildness of a Writer to them, as they do the mercy of the Government; in the one they think it Fear, and conclude it Weakness: in the other. The best way for them to confute me, is, as I before advis'd the Papists, to disclaim their Principles, and renounce their Practices. We shall all be glad to think them true Englishmen when they obey the King, and true Protestants when they conform to the Church Discipline.

It remains that I acquaint the Reader, that the Verses were written for an ingenious young Gentleman, my Friend; upon his Translation of The Critical History of the Old Testament, compos'd by the learned Father Simon: The Verses therefore are address'd to the Translator of that Work, and the style of them is, what it ought to be, Epistolary.

If any one be so lamentable a Critick as to require the Smoothness, the Numbers and the Turn of Heroick Poetry of this Poem, I must tell him, that if he has not read Horace, I have studied him, and hope the style of his Epistles is not ill imitated here. The Expressions of a Poem, design'd purely for instruction, ought to be Plain and Natural, and yet Majestick: for here the Poet is presum'd to be a kind of Law giver, and those three qualities which I have nam'd are proper to the Legislative style. The Florid, Elevated and Figurative way is for the Passions; for Love and Hatred, Fear and Anger, are begotten in the Soul by shewing their Objects out of their true proportion, either greater than the Life, or less; but instruction is to be given by shewing them what they naturally are. A Man is to be cheated into Passion, but to be reason'd into Truth.

Religio Laici.

DIM, as the borrow'd beams of Moon and Stars
 to *lonely, weary, wandering Travellers,*
 Is *Reason,* to the *Soul:* And as on high,
 Those rowling Fires *discover* but the Sky
 Not light us *here;* So *Reason's* glimmering Ray
 Was lent, not to *assure* our *doubtful way,*
 But *guide* us upward to a *better Day.*
 And as those nightly Tapers disappear,
 When Day's bright Lord ascends our Hemisphere;
 So pale grows *Reason* at *Religion's* light;
 So *dyes,* and so *dissolves* in *Supernatural Light.*
 Some few, whose Lamp shone brighter, have been led
 From Cause to Cause, to *Nature's* secret head;
 And found that *one first Principle* must be:
 But *what,* or *who,* that *UNIVERSAL HE;*
 Whether some *Soul* incompassing this Ball
Unmade, unmov'd; yet *making moving All;*
 Or various *Atoms* interfering Dance
 Leapt into *Form* (the Noble work of *Chance;*)
 Or this great *All* was from *Eternity;*
 Not ev'n the *Stagirite* himself could see;
 And *Epicurus* *gues'd* as well as *He:*
 As *blindly* *grop'd* they for a *future State;*
 As *rashly* *judg'd* of *Providence* and *Fate:*
 * But least of all could their endeavours find
 What most concern'd the good of *Humane kind:*
 For *Happiness* was never to be found;
 But vanish'd from 'em, like *Enchanted ground.*

* *Opinions of the several Sects of Philosophers concerning the Summum Bonum.*



One thought *Content* the good to be enjoy'd :

This every little *Accident* destroy'd :

The *wiser Madmen* did for *Virtue* toil :

A *Thorney*, or at best a barren *Soil* :

In *Pleasure* some their glutton *Souls* would steep ;

But found their *Line* too short, the *Well* too deep ;

And leaky *Vessels* which no *Bliss* cou'd keep.

Thus, *anxious Thoughts* in *endless Circles* roul,

Without a *Centre* where to fix the *Soul* :

In this wild *Maze* their vain *Endeavours* end,

How can the *Less* the *Greater* comprehend ?

Or *finite Reason* reach *Infinity* ?

For what cou'd *Fathom* *GOD* were *more* than *He*.

* The *Deists* thinks he stands on firmer ground ;

Cries *εὐρεκα* : the mighty *Secret's* found :

God is that *Spring* of *Good* ; *Supreme* and *Best* ;

We, made to *serve*, and in that *Service* blest ;

If so, some *Rules* of *Worship* must be given,

Distributed alike to all by *Heaven* :

Else *God* were *partial*, and to *some* deny'd

The *Means* his *Justice* shou'd for *all* provide.

This *general Worship* is to *PRAISE* and *PRAY* :

One part to *borrow* *Blessings*, one to *pay* :

And when frail *Nature* slides into *Offence*,

The *Sacrifice* for *Crimes* is *Penitence*.

Yet, since th' *Effects* of *Providence*, we find,

Are variously dispens'd to *Humane* kind ;

That *Vice* *Triumphs*, and *Virtue* *suffers* here,

(A brand that *Sovereign Justice* cannot bear ;)

Our *Reason* prompts us to a *future* *State* :

The *last Appeal* from *Fortune*, and from *Fate* :

Where *God's* all-righteous ways will be declar'd ;

The *Bad* meet *Punishment*, the *Good*, *Reward*.

† Thus *Man* by his own strength to *Heaven* wou'd soar.

And wou'd not be oblig'd to *God* for more.

* *Systeme of Deism.*

† *of Reveald Religion.*

Vain, wretched Creature, how art thou misled!
 To think thy Wit these God-like Notions bred!
 These Truths are not the product of thy Mind,
 But dropt from Heaven, and of a Nobler kind.
Reveal'd Religion first inform'd thy Sight,
 And *Reason* saw not, till *Faith* sprung the Light.
 Hence all thy *Natural Worship* takes the Source:
 'Tis *Revelation* what thou think'st *Discourse*.
 Else how com'st *Thou* to see these Truths so clear,
 Which so obscure to *Heathens* did appear?
 Not *Plato* these, nor *Aristotle* found:
 * Nor He whose Wisdom *Oracles* renown'd.
 Hast thou a Wit so deep, or so sublime,
 Or canst thou lower dive, or higher climb?
 Canst *Thou*, by *Reason*, more of God-head know
 Than *Plutarch*, *Seneca*, or *Cicero*?
 Those Gyant Wits, in happier Ages born,
 (When *Arms* and *Arts* did *Greece* and *Rome* adorn)
 Knew no such *Systeme*: no such Piles cou'd raise
 Of *Natural Worship*, built on *Pray'r* and *Praise*,
 To One sole G.O.D.
 Nor did Remorse, to expiate Sin, prescribe:
 But slew their fellow Creatures for a Bribe:
 The guiltless *Victim* groan'd for their Offence;
 And *Cruelty*, and *Blood* was *Penitence*.
 If *Sheep* and *Oxen* cou'd atone for Men,
 Ah! at how cheap a rate the *Rich* might Sin!
 And great Oppressours might Heaven's Wrath beguile,
 By offering his own Creatures for a Spoil!
 Dar'st thou, poor Worm, offend *Infinity*?
 And must the Terms of Peace be given by Thee?
 Then *Thou* art *Justice* in the last Appeal;
 Thy easy God instructs Thee to rebel:
 And, like a King remote, and weak, must take
 What Satisfaction *Thou* art pleas'd to make.

* *Socrates*

But if there be a Pow'r too *Just*, and *strong*
 To wink at *Crimes*, and bear unpunish'd *Wrong*;
 Look humbly upward, see his Will disclose
 The *Forfeit* first, and then the *Fine* impose:
 A *Mulct* thy Poverty cou'd never pay,
 Had not *Eternal Wisdom* found the way:
 And with *Coelestial Wealth* supply'd thy Store:
 His *Justice* makes the *Fine*, his *Mercy* quits the *Score*.
 See God descending in thy *Humane Frame*;
 Th' *Offended*, suffering in th' *Offenders Name*:
 All thy *Misdeeds* to him imputed see,
 And all his *Righteousness* devolv'd on thee.

For granting we have Sin'd, and that th' offence
 Of *Man*, is made against *Omnipotence*,
 Some Price, that bears *proportion*, must be paid,
 And *Infinite* with *Infinite* be weigh'd.
 See then the *Deist* lost: *Remorse* for *Vice*,
 Not paid, or paid, *inadequate* in price:
 What farther means can *Reason* now direct,
 Or what Relief from *humane Wit* expect?
 That shews us *sick*; and sadly are we sure
 Still to be *Sick*, till *Heav'n* reveal the *Cure*:
 If then *Heaven's Will* must needs be understood,
 (Which must, if we want *Cure*, and *Heaven*, be *Good*)
 Let all Records of *Will* reveal'd be shown;
 With *Scripture*, all in equal balance thrown,
 And our one *Sacred Book* will be *That one*.

Proof needs not here, for whether we compare
 That *Impious*, *Idle*, *Superstitious Ware*
 Of *Rites*, *Lustrations*, *Offering*, (which before
 In various *Ages*, various *Countries* bore)
 With *Christian Faith* and *Virtues*, we shall find
 None answer'ing the great ends of human kind
 But *This one Rule of Life*: That shews us best
 How God may be *appeas'd*, and *Mortals* blest.
 Whether from length of *Time* its worth we draw,
 The *World* is scarce more *Ancient* than the *Law*:

Heav'n's early Care prescrib'd for every Age;
 First, in the *Soul*, and after, in the *Page*.
 Or, whether more abstractedly we look,
 Or on the *Writers*, or the *written Book*,
 Whence, but from *Heav'n*, cou'd men unskill'd in Arts,
 In several Ages born, in several parts,
 Weave such *agreeing Truths*? or *how*, or *why*
 Shou'd *all* conspire to cheat us with a *Lye*?
Unask'd their *Pains*, *ungrateful* their *Advice*,
Starving their *Gain*, and *Martyrdom* their *Price*.

If on the Book it self we cast our view,
 Concurrent Heathens prove the Story *True*:
 The *Doctrine*, *Miracles*; which must convince,
 For *Heav'n* in *Them* appeals to *humane Sense*:
 And though they *prove* not, they *Confirm* the Cause,
 When what is *Taught* agrees with *Nature's Laws*.

Then for the *Style*; *Majestick* and *Divine*,
 It speaks no less than God in every Line:
Commanding words; whose *Force* is still the same
 As the first *Fiat* that produc'd our Frame.
 All Faiths *beside*, or did by *Arms* ascend;
 Or *Sense* indulg'd has made *Mankind* their *Friend*:
 This *only* Doctrine does our *Lusts* oppose:
 Unfed by Nature's Soil, in which it grows;
 Cross to our *Interests*, curbing *Sense*, and *Sin*;
 Oppress'd without, and undermin'd within,
 It thrives through pain; its own Tormentors tires;
 And with a stubborn patience still aspires.
 To what can *Reason* such effects assign
 Transcending *Nature*, but to *Laws Divine*?
 Which in that Sacred Volume are contain'd;
 Sufficient, clear, and for that use ordain'd.

* But stay: the *Deist* here will urge anew,
 No *Supernatural Worship* can be *True*:
 Because a *general Law* is that alone
 Which must to *all*, and every *where* be known:

* *Objection of the Deist.*

A Style so large as not *this* Book can claim;
 Nor ought that bears *reveal'd* Religion's Name.
 Tis said the sound of a *Messiah's Birth*
 Is gone through all the habitable Earth :
 But still that Text must be confin'd alone
 To what was *then* inhabited, and known :
 And what Provision cou'd from *thence* accrue
 To *Indian* Souls, and Worlds discover'd *New* ?
 In other parts it helps, that Ages past,
 The Scriptures there were *known*, and were *imbrac'd*,
 Till Sin spread once again the Shades of Night :
 What's that to these who never *saw* the Light ?

* Of all objections this indeed is chief
 To startle Reason, stagger frail Belief :
 We grant, 'tis true, that Heaven from humane Sense
 Has hid the secret paths of *Providence* :
 But *boundless Wisdom. boundless Mercy*, may
 Find ev'n for those *be-wildred* Souls, a *way* :
 If from his *Nature Foes* may Pity claim,
 Much more may *Strangers* who ne'er heard his *Name*.
 And though *no Name* be for *Salvation* known,
 But that of his *Eternal Son's* alone ;
 Who knows how far transcending Goodness can
 Extend the *Merits* of *that Son* to *Man* ?
 Who knows what *Reasons* may his *Mercy* lead ;
 Or *Ignorance invincible* may plead ?
 Not only *Charity* bids hope the *best*,
 But *more* the great Apostle has exprest :
That, if the Gentiles, (whom no Law inspir'd,)
By Nature did what was by Law requir'd ;
They, who the written Rule had never known,
Were to themselves both Rule and Law alone :
To Nature's plain Indictment they shall plead :
And, by their Conscience, be condemn'd or freed.
 Most righteous Doom ! because a *Rule reveal'd*
 Is *none* to *Those*, from whom it was conceal'd.

* The Objection answer'd.

B

Then

Then those who follow'd *Reason's* Dictates right;
Liv'd up, and lifted high their *Natural Light*;
With *Socrates* may see their Maker's Face,
While Thousand *Rabrick Martyrs* want a place.

Nor doth it baulk my *Charity*, to find
Th' *Egyptian* Bishop of another mind:
For, though his *Creed Eternal Truth* contains,
'Tis hard for *Man* to doom to *endless pains*
All who believ'd not all, his Zeal requir'd;
Unless he first cou'd prove he was inspir'd.
Then let us either think he meant to say
This Faith, where *publish'd*, was the only way;
Or else conclude that, *Axiom* to confute,
The good old Man, too eager in dispute,
Flew high; and as his *Christian* Fury rose
Damn'd all for *Hereticks* who durst oppose.

* Thus far my *Charity* this path hath try'd;
(A much unskilful, bur well-meaning guide:)
Yet what they are, ev'n these crude thoughts were bred
By reading that, which better thou hast read.
Thy Matchless Author's work: which thou, my Friend,
By well translating better dost commend:
Those youthful hours which, of thy Equals most
In *Toys* have squander'd, or in *Vice* have lost,
Those hours hast thou to Nobler use employ'd;
And the severe Delights of Truth enjoy'd.
Witness this weighty Book, in which appears
The crabbed Toil of many thoughtful years,
Spent by thy Author, in the Sifting Care
Of *Rabbins* old Sophisticated Ware
From Gold Divine; which he who well can sort
May afterwards make *Algebra* a sport.
A Treasure, which if *Country-Curates* buy,
They *Junius*, and *Tremellius* may defy:

* Digression to the Translator of *Father Simon's Critical History of the Old Testament*.

Save pains in various readings, and Translations;
 And without *Hebrew* make most learn'd quotations.
 A Work so full with various Learning fraught,
 So nicely pondred, yet so strongly wrought,
 As Nature's height and Art's last hand requir'd:
 As much a Man cou'd compass, uninspir'd.
 Where we may see what *Errours* have been made
 Both in the *Copiers* and *Translators Trade*:
 How *Jewish*, *Popish*, Interests have prevail'd,
 And where *Infallibility* has fail'd.

For some, who have his secret meaning guess'd,
 Have found our Author not too much a Priest:
 For *Fashion-sake* he seems to have recourse
 To *Pope*, and *Councils*, and *Tradition's* force:
 But he that *old Traditions* cou'd subdue,
 Cou'd not but find the weakness of the *New*:
 If *Scripture*, though deriv'd from *heav'nly birth*,
 Has been but carelessly preserv'd on *Earth*;
 If *God's own People*, who of *God before*
 Knew what we know, and had been promis'd more,
 In fuller Terms, of *Heav'n's* assisting Care,
 And who did neither *Time*, nor *Study* spare
 To keep this Book *untainted*, *unperplex*;
 Let in gross *Errours* to corrupt the *Text*:
 Omitted *paragraphs*, embroy'd the *Sense*;
 With vain *Traditions*, stopt the gaping Fence,
 Which every common hand pull'd up with ease:
 What Safety from such *brushwood-belts* as these?
 If *written words* from time are not secur'd,
 How can we think have *oral Sounds* endur'd?
 Which *thus* transmitted, if *one Mouth* has fail'd
Immortal Lyes on *Ages* are intail'd:
 And that some such have been, is prov'd too plain;
 If we consider *Interest*, *Church*, and *Gain*.

* Oh but says one, *Tradition* set aside,
 Where can we hope for an *unerring Guide*?

* Of the *Infallibility* of *Tradition*, in *General*.

For since th' *original* Scripture has been lost,
All Copies disagreeing, main'd the most,
 Or *Christian Faith* can have no *certain* ground,
 Or *Truth* in *Church Tradition* must be found.

Such an *Omniscient* Church we wish indeed;
 'Twere worth *Both Testaments*, and cast in the *Creed*:
 But if *this Mother* be a *Guide* so sure,
 As can all *doubts resolve*, all *truth secure*,
 Then her *Infallibility*, as well
 Where *Copies* are *corrupt*, or *lame*, can tell;
 Restore *lost Canon* with as little pains,
 As *truly explicate* what still *remains*:
 Which yet no *Council* dare *pretend* to do;
 Unless like *Esdra*s, they could *write* it new:
 Strange *Confidence*, still to *interpret* true,
 Yet not be sure that all they have explain'd,
 Is in the blest *Original* contain'd.

More safe, and much more modest 'tis, to say
God wou'd not leave Mankind without a way:
 And that the *Scriptures*, though not *every where*
 Free from *Corruption*, or *intire*, or *clear*,
 Are *uncorrupt*, *sufficient*, *clear*, *intire*,
 In *all things* which our needfull *Faith* require.
 If *others* in the *same Glass* better see,

'Tis for *Themselves* they look, but not for *me*:
 For *MY* *Salvation* must its *Doom* receive
 Not from what *OTHERS*, but what I believe.

* Must *all Tradition* then be set aside?

This to affirm were *Ignorance*, or *Pride*.
 Are there not many points, some needful sure
 To saving *Faith*, that *Scripture* leaves *obscure*?
 Which every *Sect* will wrest a *several way*
 (For what *one Sect* *Interprets*, *all Sects may* :)
 We hold, and say we prove from *Scripture* plain,
 That *Christ* is *GOD*; the bold *Socinian*
 From the *same Scripture* urges he's but *MAN*.

* *Objection in behalf of Tradition; urg'd by Father Simon.*

Now what Appeal can end th' important Suit;
Both parts talk loudly, but the *Rule* is mute?

Shall I speak plain, and in a Nation free
Assume an honest *Layman's Liberty*?

I think (according to my little Skill,)

(To my own Mother-Church submitting still)

That many have been sav'd, and many may,
Who never heard this Question brought in play.

Th' *unletter'd* Christian, who believes in *gross*,
Plods on to *Heaven*; and ne'er is at a loss:

For the *Strait-gate* wou'd be made *straiter* yet,
Were *none* admitted there but men of *Wis.*

} The few, by Nature form'd, with Learning fraught,
Born to instruct, as others to be taught,
Must Study well the Sacred Page; and see

Which Doctrine, this, or that, does best agree

With the whole Tenour of the Work Divine:

And plainliest points to Heaven's reveal'd Design:

Which Exposition flows from *genuine Sense*;

And which is forc'd by *Wis.* and *Eloquence*.

Not that Tradition's parts are uselels here:

When general, old, disinterest'd and clear:

That Ancient Fathers thus expound the Page,

Gives *Truth* the reverend Majesty of *Age*:

Confirms its force, by bideing every *Test*;

For best *Authorities* next *Rules* are *best*.

And still the nearer to the Spring we go

More limpid, more unsoyl'd the Waters flow.

Thus, *first Traditions* were a proof alone;

Cou'd we be *certain* such they *were* so *known*:

But since some Flaws in long descent may be,

They make not *Truth* but *Probability*.

Even *Arius* and *Pelagius* durst provoke

To what the *Centuries* preceeding spoke.

Such difference is there in an oft-told Tale:

But *Truth* by its own Sinews will prevail.

Tradition written therefore more commends

Authority, than what from *Voice* descends:

Now

And

And this, as perfect as its kind can be,
 Rouls down to us the Sacred History :
 Which, from the *Universal Church* receiv'd,
 Is try'd, and after, for its self believ'd.

* The partial *Papists* wou'd infer from hence
 Their Church, in last resort, shou'd Judge the *Sense*.
 † But first they wou'd assume, with wondrous Art,
 Themselves to be the *whole*, who are but *part*
 Of that vast Frame, the Church; yet grant they were
 The handers down, can they from thence infer
 A right t' interpret? or wou'd they alone
 Who brought the Present, claim it for their own?
 The *Book's* a *Common Large'ss* to *Mankind*;
 Not more for *them*, than *every Man* design'd:
 The *welcome News* is in the *Letter* found;
 The *Carrier's* not *Commission'd* to *expound*.
 It *speaks* its *Self*, and what it does contain,
 In all things *needful* to be *known*, is *plain*.

In times o'ergrown with Rust and Ignorance,
 A gainful Trade their Clergy did advance:
 When want of Learning kept the *Laymen* low,
 And none but *Priests* were *Authoriz'd* to *know*:
 When what small Knowledge was, in them did dwell;
 And he a *God* who cou'd but *Read* or *Spell*;
 Then *Mother-Church* did mightily prevail:
 She parcel'd out the Bible by *retail*:
 But still *expounded* what She *sold* or *gave*;
 To keep it in *her Power* to *Damn* and *Save*:
Scripture was *scarce*, and as the *Market* went,
 Poor *Laymen* took *Salvation* on *Content*;
 As needy men take *Money*, good or bad:
God's Word they had not, but the *Priest* they had.
 Yet whate'er *false Conveyances* they made,
 The *Lawyer* still was *certain* to be paid.

* The Second Objection.

† Answer to the objection.

In those dark times they learn'd their knack so well,
 That by long use they grew *Infallible*:
 At last, a knowing Age began t' enquire
 If *they* the Book, or *That* did *them* inspire:
 And, making narrow search, they found, tho' late,
 That what they thought the *Priests*, was *Their Estate*:
 Taught by the *Will produc'd*, (the written Word)
 How long they had been *cheated on Record*.
 Then, every Man who saw the Title fair,
 Claim'd a Child's part, and put in for a Share:
 Consulted soberly his private good;
 And sav'd himself as cheap as e'er he cou'd.
 'Tis true, my Friend, (and far be flattery hence,)
 This good had full as bad a Consequence:
 The Book thus put into every vulgar hand,
 Which each presum'd he best cou'd understand,
 The *Common Rule* was made the *common Prey*;
 And at the mercy of the *Rabble* lay.
 The tender Page with horney Fists was gaul'd;
 And he was gifted most that loudest baul'd:
 The *Spirit* gave the *Doctoral Degree*:
 And every member of a *Company*
 Was of *his Trade*, and of the *Bible free*.
 Plain *Truths* enough for needful use they found;
 But men would still be itching to expound:
 Each was ambitious of th' obscurest place,
 No measure ta'en from *Knowledge*, all from *GRACE*.
 Study and Pains were now no more their Care;
 Texts were explain'd by *Fasting*, and by *Prayer*:
 This was the Fruit the *private Spirit* brought;
 Occasion'd by *great Zeal*, and *little Thought*.
 While Crouds unlearn'd, with rude Devotion warm,
 About the Sacred Viands buz and swarm,
 The *Fly-blown Text* creates a *crawling Brood*;
 And turns to *Maggots* what was meant for *Food*.
 A *Thousand daily Sects* rise up, and dye;
 A *Thousand more* the *perish'd Race* supply:

So all we make of Heaven's discover'd Will
Is, not to have it, or to use it ill.
The Danger's much the same; on several Shelves
If *others* wreck *us*, or *we* wreck our *selves*.

What then remains, but, waving each Extreme,
The Tides of Ignorance, and Pride to stem?
Neither so rich a Treasure to forgo;
Nor proudly seek beyond our pow'r to know:
Faith is not built on disquisitions vain;
The things we *must* believe, are *few* and *plain*:
But since men *will* believe more than they *need*;
And every man will make *himself* a Creed:
In doubtful questions 'tis the safest way
To learn what unsuspected Ancients say:
For 'tis not likely *we* shou'd higher Soar
In search of Heav'n, than *all the Church* before:
Nor can we be deceiv'd, unless we see
The *Scripture*, and the *Fathers* disagree.
If after all, they stand suspected still,
(For no man's Faith depends upon his Will;)
'Tis some Relief, that points not clearly known,
Without much hazard may be let alone:
And, after hearing what our Church can say,
If still our Reason runs another way,
That private Reason 'tis more Just to curb,
Than by Disputes the publick Peace disturb.
For points obscure are of small use to learn:
But *Common* quiet is *Mankind's* concern.

Thus have I made my own Opinions clear:
Yet neither Praise expect, nor Censure fear:
And this unpolish'd, rugged Verse, I chose;
As fittest for Discourse, and nearest Prose:
For, while from *Sacred Truth* I do not swerve,
Tom Sternhold's, or *Tom Sha—ll's Rhimes* will serve.



ve.